
Book Review

Cramme, Olaf and Sara B. Hobolt (2015) (eds) Democratic Politics in a European Union under Stress. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Just as the vision of a united, democratic, and legitimate European Union (EU) has become blurred in the wake of the euro crisis, so has the European flag on the cover of the volume “Democratic Politics in a European Union under Stress” edited by Olaf Cramme and Sara B. Hobolt. In fact, the fading stars on the cover aptly depict the problem that this edited volume addresses: the growing uncertainty about the EU’s political sustainability. Bringing together leading scholars from the fields of political science, political economy, and law, the volume takes stock of the new governance structure and the internal divisions that the euro crisis has triggered, and investigates the implications for democracy and legitimacy in the EU.

The recent increase in economic and fiscal coordination at the European level in general and EU crisis management in particular have drawn fierce criticism for eroding democracy in the EU. The book approaches this complex and topical subject in two steps: the first part examines the political consequences of the crisis, while the second explores the prospects for a more legitimate and democratic EU. As the editors explain in the introduction, the twelve chapters in the collection contribute to three current debates in the field, namely, those on the presumed structural flaws of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the EU’s response to them, the ability of politicization to reduce the EU’s democratic deficit, and the future of European integration between the poles of federalism and collapse.

The first part of the volume begins and ends with a broader account of the political consequences of the crisis. Fritz W. Scharpf convincingly shows that the political legitimacy of the present euro regime is extremely fragile, whereas Frank Schimmelfennig examines how the euro crisis has affected differentiated integration. The other chapters, by contrast, scrutinize the political consequences of the crisis with regard to distinct political actors. They elaborate on EU *citizens’* complex attitudes toward the EU in the context of the crisis (Sara B. Hobolt), the Europeanization of the national political debate in the *media* (Hanspeter Kriesi and Edgar Grande), the difficulties that *political opposition* faces in times of executive-dominated emergency politics (Jonathan White), and the increasing involvement of *national legislatures* in EU politics (Tapio Raunio).

In the second part of the book, the prospects of the EU becoming more democratic and legitimate are discussed. The first and the last chapter offer innovative readings of European integration. Waltraud Schelkle presents an insurance view of monetary integration, contrasting it with optimal currency theory. Contrary to the popular opinion that it is the diversity of EU economies that is to blame for the woes of the Eurozone, Schelkle highlights the merits of that very diversity in coping with the interdependences generated by EMU. To enhance the long-term stability of EMU, she argues, fiscal surveillance must be combined with both macro-prudential financial

regulation and a set of risk-sharing mechanisms such as a fiscal back-up for the bank resolution fund, Eurobonds, and the European Central Bank serving as lender of last resort not only to financial institutions, but also to governments. Similarly thought-provoking is Sverker Gustavsson's contribution, which contends that political liberalism needs to be restored in order to sustain the informal pact of confidence the EU relies on. According to Gustavsson, this requires that problem-solving capacity (i.e., 'fate control'), legitimate opposition (i.e., the availability of distinct policy options) and legitimate protectionism (i.e., member countries' ability to choose their social model) are safeguarded.

As to the other contributions in the second part, Simon Hix gives an informative, succinct overview of the elements of the new EU economic governance structure and compares two reform options to provide democratic legitimacy to the emerging "macroeconomic union". Catherine E. de Vries as well as Damian Chalmers and Mariana Chaves investigate the current state of democracy in the EU. Whereas the latter portray the increasing bypassing of the formal legislative processes at the European level and the consequent impairment of democratic agency, de Vries examines the supranational and intergovernmental channels of electoral democracy in the EU, finding that they work better than commonly believed. Providing a broader context to these findings, Andreas Follesdal reviews the usual arguments about the democratic deficit of the EU and concludes that, drawing on federalist theory, new democratic standards need to be developed to account for the asymmetric polity of the EU.

The different focuses and approaches of the individual contributions notwithstanding, overall, they convey the impression that the *democratic deficit* and the *legitimacy problems* of the EU have *intensified* in consequence of the crisis. Opinions on the prospects and remedies for a democratic and legitimate Union differ considerably though. At one end of the spectrum is the analysis of Scharpf, who suggests that the EU in its current form is an inherently fragile political construction that is unfit for more public dialogue on its politics and policies. At the other end, by contrast, the further politicization of EU politics is considered essential for the survival of the present EU regime. However, while Raunio and de Vries argue that it is national parliaments that should be given more weight in EU policy-making, Hix holds that it is citizens who should become more strongly involved, e.g., by means of referenda.

Another lesson of the book is that the euro crisis "has challenged many existing preconceptions and long-held-assumptions within the EU" (Cramme and Hobolt: 5), which is reflected in several contributions. Schimmelfennig, for example, argues that the euro crisis has produced more integration (among euro area countries) and more differentiation (between euro and non-euro area countries) at the same time, which runs counter to existing theoretical accounts. Most strikingly, many contributions challenge the widely held view that a both politically and economically sustainable EU relies on uniform rules and member states' convergence toward a common social and economic model. Instead, the authors make the case for taking *differentiated integration* seriously (Schimmelfennig, Follesdal) and allowing for more *diversity* in economic models (Scharpf, Schelkle, Gustavsson). While this would counteract the increasing EU interference with democratic choice at the national level, which is

commonly considered one of the most important problems for democracy in the EU today, it also raises a set of new questions regarding democratic politics in the EU, such as the legitimacy of a single European Parliament, as Schimmelfennig (132-133) aptly points out.

What makes the volume a stimulating and valuable contribution to the field is that it brings together fresh perspectives on the issue of democratic politics in the ever-changing EU. For instance, one may look at EU politics through the lens of politics without rhythm, as suggested by White, or apply the concept of political liberalism to the EU polity, as advocated by Gustavsson. Even if most proposals for a more democratic and legitimate EU unfortunately remain rather general, the views presented in the volume prompt us to think in new ways about the future of European integration.

Another considerable strength of the volume is its thematic comprehensiveness. It combines contributions that, drawing on standard concepts of European integration studies and political theory, address more general, fundamental questions about the EU's political sustainability with case studies that scrutinize questions of legitimacy and democracy in the EU from the perspective of specific actors. Furthermore, the volume is diverse in methodology in that it makes use of counter-factual reasoning and a variety of empirical data, such as public-opinion polls, party positions, newspaper articles, economic indicators, and EU law. Together this adds up to an encompassing and mostly profound account of the current state and prospects of democratic politics in the EU.

At the same time, the plurality of approaches and topics makes it difficult for the reader to keep track of the arguments advanced in the book. In fact, the major shortcomings of the volume are the scanty integration of the chapters and the lack of guidance for the reader to find her way through the book more easily. Firstly, the volume seems to lack a clear common conceptual framework or vision. It remains unclear what, apart from a broad common topic, holds together the individual contributions, which hampers the integration of the arguments. Secondly, and closely related to the first point, some chapters make no reference to other contributions or the introduction to the volume, which is surprising given the thematic overlap between the chapters. Thirdly, the volume would have benefited from a concluding chapter that recalls the different trains of thought and integrates them into a broad view. Admittedly, the introductory chapter provides an integration of the arguments. Nevertheless, at the end of the volume the reader asks herself what answers the volume as a whole provides to the questions that are raised in the introduction, such as in what ways the crisis has affected democratic politics in the EU. Lastly, the structure of the book does not strike the reader as entirely plausible. As many contributions address both the political consequences of the crisis and the prospects for a democratic and legitimate EU, the division of the book into these two parts is at times confusing. Moreover, the order of the chapters in the second part appears somewhat counter-intuitive. Hix's chapter, for example, may have served as a proper introduction to the second part as it gives an overview on the new governance structure, which constitutes the natural starting point for any meaningful discussion on democratizing the EU down the road. Folledal's revision of the arguments commonly mounted in the democratic deficit debate and his case for new democratic standards,

by contrast, seems better suited for concluding the second part than Gustavsson's contribution does. This weakness, however, could be remedied if the introductory chapter outlined the setup of the chapters and explained the rationale behind it.

The above criticisms aside, Cramme and Hobolt's volume makes an important and timely contribution to both the theoretical development and the empirical analysis of democratic politics in the EU. Providing a comprehensive analysis of the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to a European Union under stress, it advances a highly topical research agenda in the field of European integration.

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